

Stop #2 – Evander and Lucy Sprague Willis (Grave #1869A)

Although most Civil War soldiers were interred by 1868, Union soldiers continued to be buried in the cemetery until the 1930s. Despite the best efforts of the burial corps, soldier remains continued to be found for decades. When farmers discovered a grave on their property, they would contact the cemetery's superintendent, who then arranged to collect and bury the remains. Local residents found the skeletons of at least two dozen soldiers after 1870 and reburied them here. Undoubtedly there were more.

After the Civil War, Congress expanded the pool of those eligible for burial in national cemeteries to include honorably discharged veterans, spouses of soldiers, and their dependent children. As a result of this legislation, several Union veterans were buried at Fredericksburg in later years. The last of these was Private Evander Willis of the 8th Vermont Infantry, who died in October 1935. Willis, who was also an owner of Ellwood Manor in the Wilderness, is buried with his wife, Lucy Sprague Willis. Like all Union veterans who died in the 20th century, Willis received a Civil War-style headstone.

As America approached the 75th anniversary of the Civil War in the 1930s, the number of veterans rapidly dwindled. Only about 10,000 veterans were still alive at the close of the decade, their average age in their early 90s. These remaining veterans were primarily enlisted men, many privates like Evander Willis, who joined the 8th Vermont at the age of eighteen. In their lifetime, they had witnessed great changes in the nation's history, including America's involvement in two other wars. As these aging veterans found their final resting places, the solemn duty of maintaining this cemetery and honoring the men buried here fell to the nation as a whole.

The Fredericksburg National Cemetery was officially closed to new burials in 1945. However, there was one United States Marine killed in action at Iwo Jima reinterred here in 1949, who shares a plot with his father, also a Marine, but veteran of World War I. Otherwise there were ten wives of deceased soldiers interred here since 1945, the last burial occurring in 1994.

One hundred and fifty years after its establishment, the cemetery is closed to burials, but still offers a place for reflection for thousands who visit every year.



Evander Willis
8th Vermont Infantry Regiment



Lucy Sprague Willis